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## Factors Affecting the Reporting of Sexual Harassment in the Navy



Stephanie Booth-Kewley

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Stephanie Booth-Kewley

Reviewed by  
Paul Rosenfeld

Approved by  
Patricia J. Thomas

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Kathleen E. Moreno  
Director, Personnel and Organizational Assessment

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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)  Only a small fraction of Navy members who experience sexual harassment use the Navy's formal grievance channels to report it. This study was conducted to identify factors associated with reporting of sexual harassment and with the filing of formal sexual harassment grievances. Telephone interviews were conducted with 228 Navy women (158 enlisted women and 70 women officers) who had been sexually harassed in the past year. The results showed that respondents were more likely to report sexual harassment if they regarded the harassment they experienced as serious, had expected positive consequences as a result of reporting, and had been encouraged to report it. Respondents were more likely to file a formal sexual harassment grievance if they regarded the sexual harassment they experienced as serious and if the harassment had involved stalking or invasion of residence. The most common reasons respondents gave for not reporting sexual harassment and for not filing grievances were that their other actions worked to stop the harassment and that they were afraid of the negative consequences.			
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## **Foreword**

This report presents the results of a research project conducted to identify factors affecting the reporting of sexual harassment in the Navy.

This project was conducted under the sponsorship of the Chief of Naval Personnel (Equal Opportunity Division). The study was funded by reimbursable Work Unit 93WREN0002293. This is the only report that will result from this effort.

The author wants to thank the Navy service members who volunteered to participate in this effort. Special thanks go to Faye Bloom for conducting a large portion of the telephone interviews, and to Dr. Marie Thomas and Dr. Paul Rosenfeld for their helpful comments on this report.

KATHLEEN E. MORENO  
Director, Personnel and  
Organizational Assessment

## Summary

### Problem

Only a small fraction of Navy personnel who experience sexual harassment use the formal grievance channels to report it. Also, many Navy members do not report incidents of sexual harassment to their supervisor. It is not clear why so few victims report their sexual harassment experiences to someone in authority.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify factors associated with reporting sexual harassment and with the filing of sexual harassment grievances.

### Method

Telephone interviews were conducted with 228 Navy women who had been sexually harassed. The sample consisted of 158 enlisted women and 70 women officers. In the interviews, respondents were asked to describe a sexual harassment experience that had happened to them in the past year. They were then asked a number of open- and closed-ended questions about the experience.

Respondents who reported being harassed to someone in authority were compared with those who did not on a variety of variables thought to be relevant to sexual harassment reporting. Respondents who filed a sexual harassment grievance were compared with those who did not file on the same variables.

### Findings

Fifty-five percent of the respondents said that they had reported the sexual harassment they experienced to someone in authority. Respondents were more likely to report sexual harassment if they regarded the harassment they experienced as serious, had expected positive consequences as a result of reporting, and had been encouraged to report it.

Thirteen percent of the respondents said they had filed a formal sexual harassment grievance. Respondents were more likely to file a grievance if they regarded the sexual harassment they experienced as serious and if the harassment had involved stalking or invasion of residence.

The most common reasons respondents gave for not reporting sexual harassment to someone in authority were that their other actions worked to stop the harassment or that they thought their work situation would become unpleasant. Similarly, the most common reasons respondents gave for not filing a formal grievance were that their other actions worked or that they were afraid of the negative consequences.

Respondents were asked, "What could the Navy do to make people more likely to use the grievance system?" The most common suggestions given were that the Navy should try to minimize the negative repercussions to victims, should have more training on sexual harassment

and on the sexual harassment grievance system, and that Navy commands should be more supportive of sexual harassment victims.

## **Conclusions**

1. The degree to which respondents perceived the sexual harassment they experienced as serious was the most important factor in determining whether they reported it and whether they filed a formal sexual harassment grievance.
2. Being encouraged to report sexual harassment and believing that reporting would lead to a positive outcome played important roles in determining whether or not respondents reported sexual harassment.
3. Many respondents did not report the sexual harassment they experienced because they were successful in resolving the problem themselves.

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# Introduction

## Problem

Recent large-scale Navy surveys have found that only a small fraction of Navy personnel who experience sexual harassment use the formal grievance channels to report it. Also, many Navy members do not report incidents of sexual harassment to their supervisor. It is not clear why so few victims report their sexual harassment experiences to someone in authority. An exploratory study was conducted to identify factors associated with reporting of sexual harassment and with the filing of sexual harassment grievances in the Navy.

## Background

Since the 1980's the Navy has taken a number of actions to prevent and manage sexual harassment, and currently has a policy of "zero tolerance" towards sexual harassment. For example, the Navy has well-defined procedures for dealing with sexual harassment complaints, gives annual training on prevention of sexual harassment, and has a toll-free sexual harassment advice and counseling phone number that Navy members can call for information and advice on sexual harassment.

Despite these efforts, sexual harassment continues to be a problem in the Navy of the 1990's. A large scale Navy survey (Navy Equal Opportunity/Sexual Harassment [NEOSH] Survey) conducted in 1991 found that approximately 44% of enlisted women and 33% of women officers in the Navy had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the preceding year (Culbertson, Rosenfeld, & Newell, 1993). The 1993 version of the same Navy survey found slightly lower but still substantial rates of harassment: 33% of enlisted women and 20% of women officers had been sexually harassed in the past year (Rosenfeld, Newell, & Le 1995; Thomas, Newell, & Eliassen, 1995).

The 1991 NEOSH Survey found that most victims of sexual harassment did not report the experience to their supervisor--only about one fourth of the female enlisted and one fifth of the female officers reported the harassment (Culbertson et al., 1993). Similar results were obtained in the 1989 NEOSH Survey (Culbertson, Rosenfeld, Booth-Kewley, & Magnusson, 1992). In both administrations of the NEOSH Survey, avoiding the harasser and telling the harasser to stop were the actions victims took most frequently in response to sexual harassment.

Why do so few victims report their sexual harassment experiences to someone in authority? The NEOSH Survey provides some clues. Respondents who had been harassed could select from 12 possible reasons for not filing a grievance and could check as many as applied to their experience. Most respondents did not file a grievance because they believed that their other actions solved the problem, they thought it would make their work situation unpleasant, or they did not think anything would be done (Culbertson et al., 1992; Culbertson et al., 1993). Although this information is helpful, much more in-depth information is needed in order to fully understand the personal dynamics involved.

Only a handful of studies have attempted to determine factors associated with the reporting of sexual harassment. Variables that have been linked with reporting or taking formal action include

the perceived offensiveness or severity of the harassment (Brooks and Perot, 1991), the frequency of the harassment (Brooks & Perot, 1991), whether the harasser was a supervisor or a coworker (Livingston, 1982), whether the victim confided in coworkers about the harassment (Schneider, 1991), and whether the victim blamed him- or herself for the harassment (Gutek, 1985).

Other factors that may play a role in formal reporting behavior include social pressure to report the harassment, characteristics of the victim (e.g., age, marital status, education), whether the harassment involved physical force, the victim's faith in the formal grievance process, and the victim's expectations regarding the consequences of reporting.

### **Purpose**

This exploratory study attempted to identify factors associated with reporting of sexual harassment and with the filing of sexual harassment grievances.

### **Method**

#### **Procedure**

Surveys accompanied by letters asking for participation in a telephone interview on sexual harassment were mailed to random samples of 2,000 female officers, 7,000 female enlisted personnel, and 4,000 male enlisted personnel--a total of 13,000 active duty Navy service members. Letters were not sent to male officers because of the very low rate of sexual harassment reported for this subgroup in recent surveys. In past administrations of the NEOSH Survey, fewer than 2% of the male officers reported being sexually harassed (Culbertson et al., 1992; 1993; Thomas et al., 1995).

Individuals who had experienced any of eight categories of sexual harassment behaviors during the past year while on duty or on base or ship were asked to participate in a telephone interview on sexual harassment. Respondents who wanted to participate could either call the toll free telephone number indicated, or they could provide a phone number where the interviewers could call them for the interview.

#### **Sample**

A total of 5,807 surveys were received. Subtracting out the undeliverable surveys (900 out of 13,000), the corrected response rate was 48% (5,807/12,200). Six hundred and seventeen respondents (11%) indicated that they had been harassed and provided a telephone number where they could be interviewed. Only 105 individuals (2%) called the toll-free telephone number.

Interviews were completed with 241 individuals. This sample of 241 was made up of 105 individuals who called the toll-free number and an additional 136 individuals randomly selected from the 617 respondents who indicated on their survey that they were willing to be interviewed.

The sample of 241 interviewees included 158 enlisted women, 13 enlisted men, and 70 female officers. Because the male enlisted subsample was so small, this report focuses on the female participants. All results are therefore based on a sample of 228 Navy women.

It should be noted that the sample of women for which results are presented was not random. This sample was drawn from a population of Navy women who said that they were willing to participate in a study of sexual harassment. Therefore, caution is warranted in generalizing the present results to the overall population of Navy women.

## Interview

The interview consisted of 48 questions, with six additional questions for individuals who had filed grievances. It took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The author or another female researcher conducted all of the interviews.

The interview contained a mixture of both open- and closed-ended questions. Respondents were first asked to think of a sexual harassment incident or a pattern of sexual harassment incidents that had occurred in the past year and to describe this experience to the interviewer. If they had experienced more than one incident or pattern of incidents, they were asked to pick the one that they considered the most serious. Respondents were then asked a number of questions about the sexual harassment experience. The questions included:

- What was the victim's relationship to the harasser (e.g., subordinate, coworker, etc.)?
- How many times did the harassment occur?
- Was any physical force involved?
- Were any threats or promises made regarding their job?
- To what degree did they hold themselves responsible for the harassment?
- How serious did they regard the harassment?

Respondents were also asked questions regarding the actions they took after the harassment. These questions included:

- Did they report the experience to anyone in authority?
- Did they file a formal grievance?
- How many people did they confide in about the harassment?
- Did anyone encourage them to report the harassment?
- Did anyone discourage them from reporting the harassment?
- How much social support did they expect to get if they reported the harassment?
- How much faith did they have in their chain of command?
- How much faith did they have in the formal grievance process?

The interview also included demographic questions assessing the respondents' age, education level, marital status, tenure in the Navy, enlisted versus officer status, and paygrade or rank. The respondents' racial/ethnic status was not assessed.

Respondents were not asked to provide their names or any other identifying information. They were assured that the information they provided in the interview would be kept confidential and would have no effect on their Navy career.

### **Content Coding**

Some of the information obtained from the interviews had to be content coded. Initially, the sexual harassment experiences that interviewees described were classified into the eight categories used on the NEOSH Survey (Culbertson et al., 1992, 1993) and in other sexual harassment studies (e.g., Martindale, 1991; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981, 1988). However, one of the eight categories had to be broadened and a ninth category had to be added to account for all of the incidents. "Actual or attempted rape or assault" was changed to "actual, attempted, or threatened rape or assault." "Stalking/invasion of residence" became the ninth category. The final nine categories were: (1) unwanted sexual whistles, calls, hoots, or yells; (2) unwanted sexual looks, staring or gestures; (3) unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions; (4) unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching; (5) unwanted pressure for dates; (6) unwanted pressure for sexual favors; (7) unwanted letters, phone calls or material of a sexual nature; (8) actual, attempted or threatened rape or assault; and (9) stalking/invasion of residence.

Three of the open-ended interview questions required content coding. Responses to "What did you think the consequences of reporting the sexual harassment would be?" were coded as either "expected positive consequences" or "did not expect positive consequences."

Responses to "Why didn't you file a formal grievance?" were coded into the following 13 categories: (1) My other actions worked, (2) Was afraid of the negative consequences, (3) The harassment was not that serious, (4) Did not think anything would be done, (5) Did not want to get the harasser in trouble, (6) Did not think it was the appropriate thing to do, (7) Did not know how to go about it, (8) Did not think I would be believed, (9) Did not want to be a troublemaker, (10) Did not think I had enough evidence, (11) Was able to avoid the harasser, (12) Was told by an authority not to file, and (13) Other.

Responses to the open-ended question, "What could the Navy do to make people more likely to use the grievance system?" were coded into the following 11 categories: (1) Have more training on sexual harassment/grievances, (2) Minimize negative repercussions to the victim, (3) Remove grievance process from victim's chain of command, (4) Make the system faster/easier to use, (5) More command support for the victim, (6) Publicize the grievance system more, (7) Make the system more confidential, (8) Demonstrate that the system works, (9) Don't Know, (10) Other, and (11) No changes needed.

Two research assistants performed the content coding. Discrepancies were resolved by a third researcher.

## Results

### Description of the Respondents

The sample ( $N = 228$ ) consisted of 158 enlisted women and 70 women officers. The respondents ranged in age from 19 to 47, with a mean age of 29. The enlisted women ranged in paygrade from E-2 to E-8; the women officers ranged in rank from O-1 to O-6. Tenure in the Navy ranged from 1 to 21 years, with a mean tenure of 8 years. Most of the enlisted women had either a high school degree only (35%) or some college but no degree (54%). Virtually all female officers (97%) had a bachelor's degree or higher.

### Sexual Harassment Experiences

Although the sexual harassment experiences of the sample are described below, these results are *not* generalizable to the Navy as a whole and are not directly comparable to large-scale random sample studies of sexual harassment (e.g., Culbertson et al., 1992). This is because the present sample is not a random sample of Navy women or a random sample of Navy members who have been sexually harassed.

Of the 228 women in the sample, 225 (99%) were harassed by males, and three (1%) were harassed by other women.

Most of the respondents were harassed either by coworkers (49%) or supervisors (31%). Very few respondents (3%) said they were harassed by their subordinates. About one fifth (17%) of the respondents were harassed by someone outside their own chain of command (e.g., someone who worked on the same base but not in the same work center). Most of the respondents said that the harassment they experienced occurred on base (93%)—and during work hours (90%).

The types of harassment reported are shown in Table 1. Unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions was the most common form of harassment experienced (63%), followed by unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching (39%), and unwanted pressure for dates (21%). Relatively few respondents experienced unwanted pressure for sexual favors (12%), unwanted letters, phone calls or material of a sexual nature (9%), unwanted sexual looks, staring or gestures (8%), or unwanted sexual whistles, calls, hoots, or yells (8%). Actual, attempted or threatened rape or assault was reported by 6% of the sample. Stalking/invasion of residence was reported by 6% of the sample. The percentages do not sum to 100 because respondents could report more than one type of harassment. Slightly less than half of the respondents (48%) experienced one form of sexual harassment; slightly more than half (52%) experienced two or more forms.

Most respondents (82%) described experiences that involved only one harasser. Smaller numbers of respondents described experiences involving two harassers (6%), from three and seven harassers (6%), and eight or more harassers (6%).

The number of times respondents were sexually harassed in the past year ranged from once to “hundreds of times.” About one quarter of the respondents (27%) reported being harassed one time. About one-half (47%) reported being harassed between 2 and 25 times. Another one quarter of the respondents (26%) had been sexually harassed more than 25 times.

**Table 1**  
**Variables Studied in Relation to Reporting of Harassment**

Variable
<b>Respondent Characteristics</b>
Paygrade/Rank
Enlisted vs. officer status
Tenure in the Navy
Age
Education level (high school degree only, some college, bachelor's degree or higher)
Marital Status (married vs. not married)
<b>Forms of Harassment</b>
Unwanted sexual whistles, calls, hoots, or yells
Unwanted sexual looks, staring or gestures
Unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions
Unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching
Unwanted pressure for dates
Unwanted pressure for sexual favors
Unwanted letters, phone calls or material of a sexual nature
Actual, attempted or threatened rape or assault
Stalking/invasion of residence
<b>Other Characteristics of the Harassment</b>
Number of forms of harassment experienced
Frequency of harassment
Number of harassers
Whether or not the harasser was respondent's supervisor
Whether the harasser made threats to respondent's job
Whether the harasser made promises about respondent's job
Whether the harasser used force or threats of force
<b>Post-Harassment Variables</b>
Number of people respondent confided in
Whether anyone encouraged respondent to report the harassment
Whether anyone discouraged respondent from reporting the harassment
<b>Respondent Perceptions</b>
Perceived seriousness of the harassment (extremely, moderately, somewhat, not at all)
Degree to which respondent held herself responsible for the harassment (large degree, small degree, no degree)
Amount of social support respondent expected if she were to report the harassment (large amount, slight amount, none)
Whether respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting the harassment
Amount of faith respondent had in the formal grievance process (large amount, slight amount, none)
Amount of faith respondent had in the chain of command where the harassment occurred (large amount, slight amount, none)

Only 6% of the respondents said that the sexual harassment they experienced involved explicit threats to their jobs (e.g., the harasser threatened to lower the victim's performance evaluations if she did not comply). Only 4% said that the sexual harassment they experienced involved promises regarding their jobs (e.g., the harasser promised to give the victim better work assignments if she complied).

Fifty-five percent of the respondents reported the harassment to someone in authority (which *in itself* does not constitute filing a formal grievance) and 13% filed a formal grievance. Reporting harassment and filing a grievance correlated significantly ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ).

### **Variables Associated With Reporting Harassment to Someone in Authority**

Respondents who had reported their harassment to someone in authority ( $n = 126$ ) were compared with those who did *not* report the harassment ( $n = 102$ ) on all of the variables shown in Table 1. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed on each of these variables; whether or not the respondent reported the harassment was the dichotomous independent variable.

Significant differences at the  $p < .05$  level were found for 10 of the 31 variables examined. These are shown in Table 2. A victim's likelihood of reporting the harassment to someone in authority was significantly increased if she: (1) was enlisted rather than an officer; (2) had less tenure in the Navy; (3) was younger; (4) had experienced actual, attempted, or threatened rape or assault; (5) had experienced force or threats of force as part of the harassment; (6) had confided in more than one person about the problem; (7) had been encouraged to report the harassment; (8) had been discouraged from reporting the harassment; (9) had regarded the harassment as fairly serious; or (10) had expected that reporting the harassment would lead to positive consequences. Surprisingly, being discouraged from reporting was positively associated with reporting. Being encouraged to report was positively associated with being discouraged ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ), and with the number of people confided in ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ). Individuals who reported their harassment to someone in authority were more likely to have told more people about what had happened to them, and to have received both encouragement *and* discouragement for reporting.

Further analyses were conducted to provide a clearer picture of how perceived seriousness contributes to the reporting of harassment. Partial correlations with whether harassment was reported to someone in authority were computed for each variable that was significant in the ANOVAs. Perceived seriousness was the control variable. These correlations are shown in Table 3, with the zero-order correlations shown for comparison purposes.

With perceived seriousness of the harassment controlled, most of the variables that had been statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) became nonsignificant. Three variables remained significantly associated with reporting of sexual harassment: whether the respondent had expected positive consequences as a result of reporting ( $r = .34, r_p = .31$ ), whether anyone had encouraged the respondent to report the harassment ( $r = .30, r_p = .19$ ), and the respondent's tenure in the Navy ( $r = -.19, r_p = -.14$ ). Respondents were more likely to report sexual harassment to someone in

**Table 2**  
**Variables Associated With Reporting Sexual Harassment**

Variable	F	Significance
Enlisted vs. officer status	6.41	<.01
Tenure in the Navy	8.71	<.01
Age	5.96	<.05
Actual/attempted/threatened rape or assault were experienced	7.85	<.01
Whether the harasser used force/threats of force	8.77	<.01
Number of people respondent confided in	5.56	<.05
Whether anyone encouraged respondent to report the harassment	22.92	<.01
Whether anyone discouraged respondent from reporting the harassment	8.08	<.01
Perceived seriousness of the harassment	59.63	<.01
Whether respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting	27.62	<.01

Note.  $df = 1, 226$  for all variables except for "Whether respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting," which had  $df = 1, 216$ .

**Table 3**  
**Zero-Order and Partial Correlations With Reporting Sexual Harassment**

Variable	<i>r</i>	<i>r<sub>p</sub></i> <sup>a</sup>
Enlisted vs. officer status	-.17*	-.09
Tenure in the Navy	-.19**	-.14*
Age	-.16*	-.07
Actual/attempted/threatened rape or assault	.18**	.09
Whether force/threats of force were used	.19**	.06
Number of people respondent confided in	.16*	.09
Whether anyone encouraged respondent to report	.30**	.19**
Whether anyone discouraged respondent from reporting	.19**	.08
Perceived seriousness of the harassment	.45**	--
Whether respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting	.34**	.31**

<sup>a</sup> $r_p$  = partial correlation, controlling for respondents' perceived seriousness of the harassment.

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

authority if they had expected positive consequences as a result of reporting, had been encouraged to report the harassment, and had *less* tenure in the Navy.<sup>1</sup>

A stepwise multiple regression analysis helped to find the combination of variables best able to predict whether the harassment was reported to someone in authority. The 10 variables revealed by the ANOVA and the zero-order correlations to be significant at the  $p <.05$  level were the predictors, and whether the harassment was reported served as the criterion.

The results of the multiple regression closely paralleled the zero-order and partial correlations. As shown in Table 4, three variables made a *unique* contribution to the prediction of whether sexual harassment was reported to someone in authority. These variables were: (1) perceived seriousness of the harassment, (2) whether the respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting, and (3) whether anyone had encouraged the victim to report the harassment. Thirty-one percent of the variance ( $R^2 = .31$ ) in reporting sexual harassment was explained by these three predictors. Although tenure in the Navy had a significant partial correlation with reporting, it did not enter into the regression equation.

**Table 4**  
**Multiple Regression to Predict Reporting of Sexual Harassment**

Variable	Beta	R
Perceived seriousness of the harassment	.38*	.46
Whether respondents expected positive consequences as a result of reporting the harassment	.26*	.53
Whether anyone encouraged respondent to report the harassment	.16*	.56

\* $p < .01$ .

### Reasons for Not Reporting Sexual Harassment

Respondents who had not reported their harassment to anyone in authority ( $n = 102$ ) were asked why they did not. They were presented with eight possible reasons for not reporting the harassment and could endorse as many as applied to their experience. The frequently endorsed reasons were that their other actions worked (43%), they thought their work situation would become unpleasant (34%), they thought nothing would be done (25%), or they did not think the harassment was serious enough (25%). Relatively few respondents endorsed the other possible reasons, such as that they thought they would not be believed (9%), they were too embarrassed (6%), or they thought they would be blamed (4%). Fifteen percent of the respondents gave other reasons for not reporting, such as that they did not want to get the harasser in trouble or they did not know their rights.

<sup>1</sup>Several of the interview respondents explained to the interviewers that after one has been in the Navy for a while, she learns from talking to other sailors that reporting sexual harassment within one's own chain of command "just does not pay" and puts a "black mark" on one's Navy career.

It might be argued that it was reasonable for respondents who gave two of the reasons—"My other actions worked" and "The harassment was not that serious"—to not report their harassment to anyone. The percentage of respondents who did not report their harassment ( $n = 102$ ) and who did not endorse either of these two reasons was calculated. (The percentage cannot be obtained by simply summing the percentages obtained for each individual reason because multiple responses were allowed.) With the removal of the respondents who had endorsed one or both of the two "reasonable" explanations for not reporting, only 37% ( $n = 38$ ) of the nonreporters remained. Thus, 38 out of 228 respondents—17% of the sample—had not reported their harassment and they gave reasons for not reporting other than the two "reasonable" ones.

### **Variables Associated With Filing a Grievance**

While reporting sexual harassment to someone in authority was a relatively common behavior in this sample (engaged in by 55% of respondents), filing a formal grievance was rare. Only 30 of the 228 respondents (13%) filed a formal sexual harassment grievance.<sup>2</sup>

To identify differences between those who filed a sexual harassment grievance and those who did not, filers ( $n = 30$ ) and nonfilers ( $n = 198$ ) were compared on the same variables on which reporters and nonreporters were compared (all variables shown in Table 1). One-way ANOVAs were performed on each of these variables, with grievance filing as the dichotomous independent variable.

Significant differences at the  $p < .05$  level were found for six of the variables (see Table 5). Likelihood of filing a grievance was significantly increased if a respondent: (1) had experienced stalking/invasion of residence, (2) had been harassed by few individuals, (3) had experienced force or threats of force, (4) had been encouraged to report the harassment, (5) regarded the harassment as fairly serious, or (6) had expected that reporting the harassment would lead to positive consequences. All of these findings are intuitively plausible except (2). Why would individuals harassed by few harassers be more likely to file a grievance? Apparently, individuals who had been harassed by few harassers (typically one) were more likely to have experienced the more serious forms of harassment—consequently, they were more likely to file a grievance. This idea is supported by the negative correlation ( $r = -.34$ ) between number of harassers and perceived seriousness of harassment. It is further supported by the joint frequency distributions between number of harassers and form of harassment (e.g., whistles vs. teasing vs. stalking)—these revealed that the more severe forms of harassment typically involved a sole harasser, but the "milder" forms of harassment often involved multiple harassers.

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<sup>2</sup>This is somewhat higher than has been found in previous Navy research on sexual harassment (Culbertson et al., 1992, 1993). This is not surprising, however, given that the present sample is not a random sample of the Navy; respondents who had filed grievances may have been especially likely to volunteer for this study.

**Table 5**  
**Variables Associated With Filing a Grievance**

Variable	F	Significance
Stalking/invasion of residence was experienced	7.93	< .01
Number of harassers	3.92	< .05
Whether the harasser used force or threats of force	7.45	< .01
Whether anyone encouraged respondent to report the harassment	7.02	< .01
Perceived seriousness of the harassment	38.50	< .01
Whether respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting	4.59	< .05

Note.  $df = 1, 226$  for all variables except for "Whether respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting," which had  $df = 1, 216$ .

As was found for reporting of harassment, perceived seriousness had the strongest effect on grievance filing. However, it was also correlated with most of the other variables that were associated with grievance filing. Therefore, further analyses were conducted to provide a clearer picture of how perceived seriousness contributes to grievance filing. For each of the variables revealed by the ANOVAs to be significant, partial correlations with grievance filing were computed, with perceived seriousness controlled. These correlations are shown in Table 6, with the zero-order correlations shown alongside to allow comparison.

**Table 6**  
**Zero-Order and Partial Correlations With Grievance Filing**

Variable	<i>r</i>	<i>r<sub>p</sub></i> <sup>a</sup>
Stalking/invasion of residence was experienced	.18**	.15*
Number of harassers	-.13*	-.01
Whether the harasser used force or threats of force	.18**	.08
Whether anyone encouraged respondent to report the harassment	.17*	.07
Perceived seriousness of the harassment	.38**	—
Whether respondent expected positive consequences as a result of reporting	.14*	.10

<sup>a</sup> $r_p$  = partial correlation, controlling for respondents' perceived seriousness of the harassment.

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

With perceived seriousness of the harassment controlled, most of the variables that had been statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) became nonsignificant. One variable remained significantly linked with grievance filing—whether the respondent had experienced stalking/invasion of residence ( $r = .18$ ,  $r_p = .15$ ).

A stepwise multiple regression analysis identified the combination of variables that best predicted grievance filing. The six variables revealed by the ANOVAs to be significant at the .05 level were the predictors; whether a grievance was filed was the criterion. Two variables made a *unique* contribution to the prediction of grievance filing: (1) Perceived seriousness of the harassment, and (2) whether stalking/invasion of residence was experienced (see Table 7). These results are, of course, consistent with the pattern of results revealed by the zero-order and partial correlations.

**Table 7**  
**Multiple Regression to Predict Filing a Formal Grievance**

Variable	Beta	R
Perceived seriousness of the harassment	.37**	.38
Stalking/invasion of residence	.14*	.41

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

A concrete picture of the role that perceived seriousness played in grievance filing is shown by the fact that every individual in the sample who filed a grievance ( $n = 30$ ) rated the harassment they experienced as either serious or extremely serious (vs. 73% of the respondents who did not file a grievance). It appears that a respondent's belief that the harassment she experienced was serious was a necessary but not sufficient condition for grievance filing.

#### **Reasons Respondents Gave for Not Filing a Grievance**

Respondents who had not filed a grievance ( $n = 198$ ) were asked why they did *not* file. (This was an open-ended question—response options were not presented to them.) These reasons were categorized and are shown in Table 8. Most respondents felt that their other actions worked to stop the harassment or that they were afraid of the negative consequences. Fear of negative consequences included being afraid that filing a grievance would ruin their career, being afraid that it would make their work situation unpleasant, and being afraid that the harasser would retaliate. Other reasons respondents gave for not filing a grievance included believing that the harassment they experienced was not that serious, thinking that nothing would be done if they did file, and not wanting to get the harasser in trouble. Small numbers of respondents chose not to file for other reasons, such as they did not know how to go about it.

#### **Satisfaction With How Grievances Were Handled**

The respondents who had filed a formal grievance ( $n = 30$ ) were asked how satisfied they were with how their grievances were handled. Thirteen of the 30 grievance-filers (43%) were satisfied or extremely satisfied with how their grievances were handled, ten (33%) were dissatisfied or

**Table 8**  
**Reasons Respondents Gave for Not Filing a Grievance**

Reason	<i>n</i>	%
My other actions worked	66	33
Was afraid of the negative consequences	46	23
The harassment was not that serious	29	15
Did not think anything would be done	23	12
Did not want to get harasser in trouble	16	8
Did not think it was appropriate	11	5
Did not know how to go about it	10	5
Did not think I would be believed	10	5
Did not want to be a troublemaker	10	5
Did not think I had enough evidence	8	4
Was able to avoid the harasser	7	4
Was told by an authority not to file	5	3
Other	14	7

*Notes.* 1. Based on respondents (*n* = 198) who did not file a grievance.

2. Multiple responses allowed.

extremely dissatisfied, and one was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In addition, three grievance-filers (10%) said that their grievances were still pending, and three others (10%) did not know how satisfied they were because they had never heard the outcome of their grievances.

### **What Could the Navy do to Make People More Likely to Use the Grievance System?**

All respondents were asked the open-ended question, "What could the Navy do to make people more likely to use the grievance system?" Responses to this question are shown in Table 9. A wide range of suggestions was offered by respondents. The most common suggestions were that the Navy should try to minimize the negative repercussions to victims, that the Navy should have more training on sexual harassment and/or the sexual harassment grievance system, and that commands should be more supportive of sexual harassment victims. Some respondents suggested that the grievance process be removed from the victim's chain of command to minimize negative effects to the victim. Others felt that the Navy should publicize the grievance system more. Some suggested that the Navy demonstrate to service members that the grievance system works (i.e., harassers really are punished and victims' careers are not ruined).

### **Perceptions of the Grievance System**

All respondents were asked, "Do you feel that the Navy's grievance procedure is an effective way to stop sexual harassment?" Fifty-three percent of the respondents answered "Yes" to this question, 31% answered "No," and 16% answered "Maybe" or "Don't Know." Thus, more than

**Table 9**  
**Responses to "What Could the Navy do to Make People  
More Likely to Use the Grievance System?"**

Reason	<i>n</i> <sup>a</sup>	%
Minimize negative repercussions to victims	53	23
Have more training on sexual harassment/grievances	51	22
More command support for victims	34	15
Remove grievance process from victims' chains of command	29	13
Publicize the grievance system more	25	11
Demonstrate that the system works	21	9
Make the system more confidential	16	7
Make the system faster/easier to use	11	5
Don't know	12	5
Other	19	8
No changes needed	5	2

*Note.* Multiple responses allowed.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 228.

half the sample viewed the Navy's sexual harassment grievance system as effective; only about a third viewed it as clearly ineffective.

Respondents were also asked "How much faith do you have in the Navy's sexual harassment grievance process?" Thirty-five percent of the respondents said that they have a large amount of faith in the grievance system and 53% said that they have a slight amount of faith. The remaining 12% of the sample indicated having no faith in the grievance process.

## Discussion

Although the Navy has taken a serious stance against sexual harassment and has developed numerous policies to deal with it (OPNAV 5300.9, Chief of Naval Operations, 1989; SECNAVINST 5300.26B, Secretary of the Navy, 1993), sexual harassment continues to be a problem. Accurate and complete reporting of sexual harassment is a critical step in any attempt to eliminate it. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine why Navy members who are victims of sexual harassment so rarely report it. Two types of reporting behavior were examined separately: (1) whether the harassment was reported to someone in authority and (2) whether formal sexual harassment grievances were filed. More than half of the sample reported their harassment to someone in authority; only 13% filed a formal grievance.

This investigation found that for both types of reporting, the degree to which victims perceived the sexual harassment they experienced as serious played the largest role in whether they reported it. Aside from perceived seriousness, the predictors of the two types of sexual harassment reporting (telling someone in authority vs. filing a formal grievance) tended to be different. The other

variables that best predicted the reporting of harassment to someone in authority were whether the respondent had expected positive consequences as a result of reporting and whether someone had encouraged the respondent to report the harassment. The variable other than seriousness of harassment that predicted whether a formal grievance was filed was whether they had experienced stalking/invasion of residence. Caution is warranted, however, in interpreting and generalizing these findings because only a small number ( $n = 30$ ) and proportion of the present sample filed formal grievances.

Respondents in the present sample varied widely on the types of behaviors that they regarded as serious. There were respondents who experienced sexual jokes and comments who rated these behaviors as "extremely serious." At the same time, there were respondents who experienced unwanted sexual touching (e.g., of their breasts and other body parts) who rated these behaviors as "somewhat serious." Although the Navy has recently sought to classify behaviors that might be considered sexual harassment into behavioral zones (Red, Yellow, and Green) reflective of the severity of the behavior (SECNAVINST 5300.26B, Secretary of the Navy, 1993), the results of the present study suggest that judgments of the seriousness of sexual harassment involve an important subjective component.

A potential new "discovery" of the present study was the negative correlation obtained between the number of harassers involved in the harassment experience and the degree to which the respondent perceived the harassment as serious. This result occurred because more severe forms of harassment (e.g., sexual touching or stalking) typically involved a single harasser, while the "milder" forms of harassment (e.g., whistling or teasing) often involved multiple harassers.

The most common reasons respondents gave for not reporting sexual harassment and for not filing grievances were that their other actions worked to stop the harassment and that they were afraid of the negative consequences (e.g., their work situation would become unpleasant). The first finding is a very positive one. It shows that in many cases, respondents were successful in bringing the harassment to an end themselves. This finding is clearly in line with the Navy's new policies and training on sexual harassment and the Navy's new Informal Resolution System (Department of the Navy, 1993), which encourage individuals who feel they have been sexually harassed to resolve the problem themselves. The second finding is less positive. It suggests that fear of negative repercussions as a result of reporting sexual harassment is still fairly prevalent.

The present findings on why respondents did not report sexual harassment are similar to those of other recent studies (Culbertson et al., 1992, 1993; Martindale, 1991; Thomas et al., 1995; U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981, 1988). In each of these studies, many victims said they did not report harassment because they handled the problem themselves and that they were afraid of the negative consequences of reporting (e.g., their work situation would become unpleasant).

When asked what the Navy could do to make sexual harassment victims more likely to use the formal grievance system, the most common suggestions were that negative repercussions to the victims should be minimized and that the Navy should give more training on sexual harassment and/or on the grievance system. Some of the respondents reported that they knew very little about the sexual harassment grievance process, or had learned about it only recently, after being in the Navy for several years. Another common suggestion was that Navy commands should be more supportive of victims. Some respondents said that they had observed or heard of other service

members who had filed sexual harassment complaints who received little or no support from their commands and, in some cases, were ostracized. Another suggestion was that the process of grievance filing should be completely removed from the victim's chain of command. This, respondents argued, would minimize the negative consequences and uncomfortable social dynamics that occur when an individual reports sexual harassment through his or her own chain of command.

What victims do in the way of reporting is clearly influenced by whether or not they receive encouragement from their friends, family, and coworkers. In this study, being encouraged to report harassment seemed to be an important trigger to the act of reporting. Respondents were also more likely to report harassment if they expected that doing so would lead to positive outcomes.

The Navy's social norms generally do not encourage the reporting of sexual harassment. Many of the respondents in the present study who filed a sexual harassment grievance did so *despite* the warnings of other Navy members that doing so might seriously harm their careers. Many respondents who had not filed grievances found the formal grievance process to be highly threatening and the possible consequences intimidating. They seemed to believe that there is nothing positive to be gained by reporting harassment, but there is much to lose, both in terms of their careers and their day-to-day work environments.

The Navy's current policies stress that individuals who perceive that they have been harassed should try to resolve complaints informally, at the lowest possible level. The findings of this study suggest that encouraging members to use informal resolution as much as possible is reasonable, but asking them to attempt informal resolution without any assistance (other than from their immediate supervisor) may at times be inappropriate or unrealistic. Some of the respondents in this study experienced serious forms of harassment by Navy members of a high rank (e.g., admirals) or by members who had power over them (e.g., "A" school instructors). In these instances, the victims did not feel comfortable confronting their harassers, and it was clear that the harassers had done something out of line. When they tried to have a third person intervene on their behalf (e.g., their immediate supervisor), the third person sometimes declined due to fear of negative consequences. Telling members that they should exercise all available options for informal resolution yet giving them no organizational support for doing so puts them in a difficult position.

As stated earlier, a limitation of the present study is that the sample was not a random sample of Navy women. Instead, the sample was drawn from a population of Navy women who volunteered to participate in a study of sexual harassment. Therefore, caution is warranted in generalizing the present results to the overall population of Navy women.

It is important that the negative findings of this study not overwhelm the positive ones. Most of the respondents interviewed for this study made positive comments about the Navy's policy of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment. Most of the respondents viewed the Navy's grievance process as an effective way to stop sexual harassment, and most said that they have faith in the Navy's grievance process. Most importantly, for a large number of the respondents, their reason for not reporting sexual harassment was the fact that they were able to resolve the problem themselves. These are all positive factors which can be built on to further improve the sexual harassment climate in the Navy.

## Conclusions

1. The degree to which respondents perceived the sexual harassment they experienced as serious was the most important factor in determining whether they reported it and whether they filed a formal sexual harassment grievance.
2. Being encouraged to report sexual harassment and believing that reporting would lead to a positive outcome played important roles in determining whether respondents reported sexual harassment.
3. Many respondents did not report the sexual harassment they experienced because they were successful in resolving the problem themselves.

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